

### *Safer, Healthier School Portables Coming*

In the final ten minutes of the legislative session, Senator Garagiola successfully passed a bill (SB 552) that will lead to new regulations concerning the indoor air quality of portable classrooms. After numerous instances of mold and condemnation of some portable classrooms in Potomac, Senator Garagiola has sought tougher standards.

Senator Garagiola's bill will require regulations to enhance indoor air quality for all new portables purchased or leased after the beginning of the next school year. The regulations will require each portable unit:

- To include appropriate air barriers to limit infiltration;
- To be constructed in a manner that provides protection against water damage through the use of proper roofing materials, exterior sheathing, water drainage systems, and flashing;
- To provide a continuous forced ventilation when the unit is occupied;
- To include a programmable thermostat;
- To be outfitted with energy efficient lighting and heating and air-conditioning; and
- To be constructed with building materials that contain low amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOC).

Unfortunately, the new standards will not apply to existing portables. Senator Garagiola believes that this is a positive step forward to ensuring a safe and healthy environment for our students and teachers.

### *Alternative, Renewable Fuels in Our Future*

In the final five minutes of the legislative session, Senator Garagiola successfully passed legislation (SB 261) he introduced to promote alternative, renewable fuel in Maryland.

The bill creates a blue ribbon commission to examine ways to promote clean fuel in Maryland. The commission will be required to make recommendations by December 31, 2007, before the next legislative session, and will examine the following:

- Ways to integrate biodiesel and other renewable fuels into motor fuels in the State and local public fleets;
- Incentives or mandates to integrate biodiesel and other renewable fuels in the private and public sector;
- Home heating issues (related to alternative home heating oil);
- Economic and environmental impacts on Maryland, including Maryland agriculture, regarding the use of biodiesel and other renewable fuels;
- How the use of biodiesel and other renewable fuels would affect agricultural supplies and other fuel supplies in Maryland;
- Maryland energy policy in terms of improving the state's energy supply concerning liquid fuels, availability of renewable fuels, and other related issues.

Senator Garagiola believes that Maryland needs to be a leader in renewable fuel use. Representing two-thirds of Montgomery County's agricultural reserve, Senator Garagiola also believes that bio-fuels will be beneficial for local farmers. Senator Garagiola anticipates serving on the Commission and looks forward to working with various stakeholders to chart Maryland's future concerning alternative, renewable fuels.

### *Incremental Progress on Healthcare Initiatives*

As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee's Subcommittee on Health, Senator Garagiola moved on several healthcare bills to make health coverage more affordable and to provide new healthcare options for employers.

Legislation was passed promoting prevention initiatives, which will allow insurers to offer discounts on their policies to small employers who participate in wellness programs.

Other legislation was passed that will modify the community rating in the small group market, which should make health coverage more affordable for younger individuals. In Maryland, 28% of those between 19 and 29 years old are uninsured.

A third bill that passed will enable certain dependents up to the age of 25 to be covered under a parent's health insurance policy.

Another bill will create a new low-cost, limited benefit health product for part-time and temporary workers, which will enable employers to provide more cost-effective healthcare options for some of their employees.

Additional legislation mandated studies to examine whether Maryland should require an individual mandate to purchase health insurance, similar to requiring drivers to purchase auto insurance.

As Chair of a Joint Committee on Healthcare Delivery and Financing, which will meet during the summer and fall this year, Senator Garagiola will also explore expanding coverage to low-income individuals and measures to help businesses afford health coverage for their employees. Much more work needs to be done!